CRITICS CHOICE MAGAZINE

SILVER SURFER

SENTINEL OF THE SPACEWAYS!
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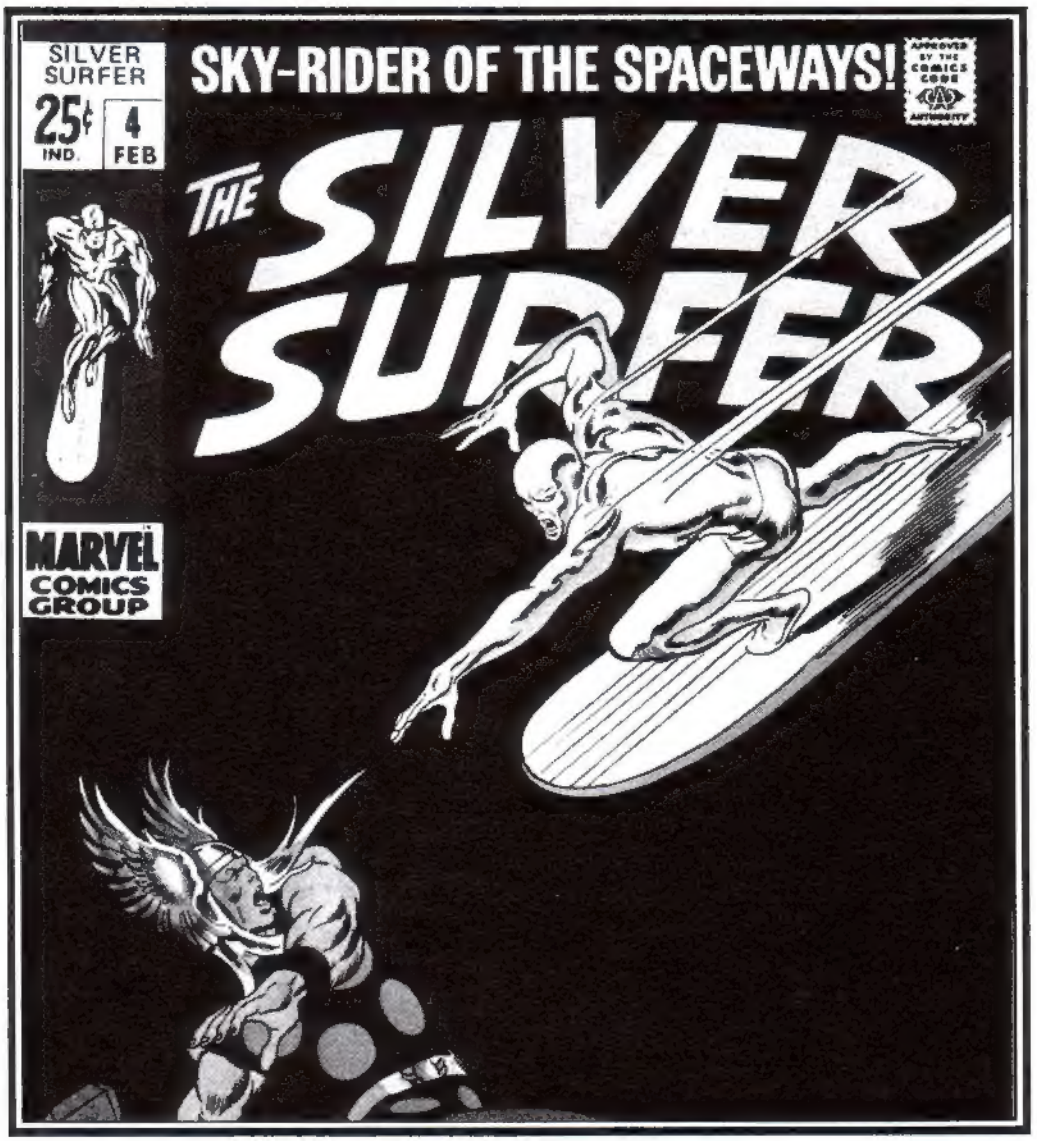
BIG PREMIERE ISSUE
THE ORIGIN OF THE SILVER SURFER!

AN ANALYSIS OF ISSUES #1—9

BY JAMES VAN HISE

CRITICS CHOICE MAGAZINE

SILVER SURFER



Designed and Edited by
Hal Schuster

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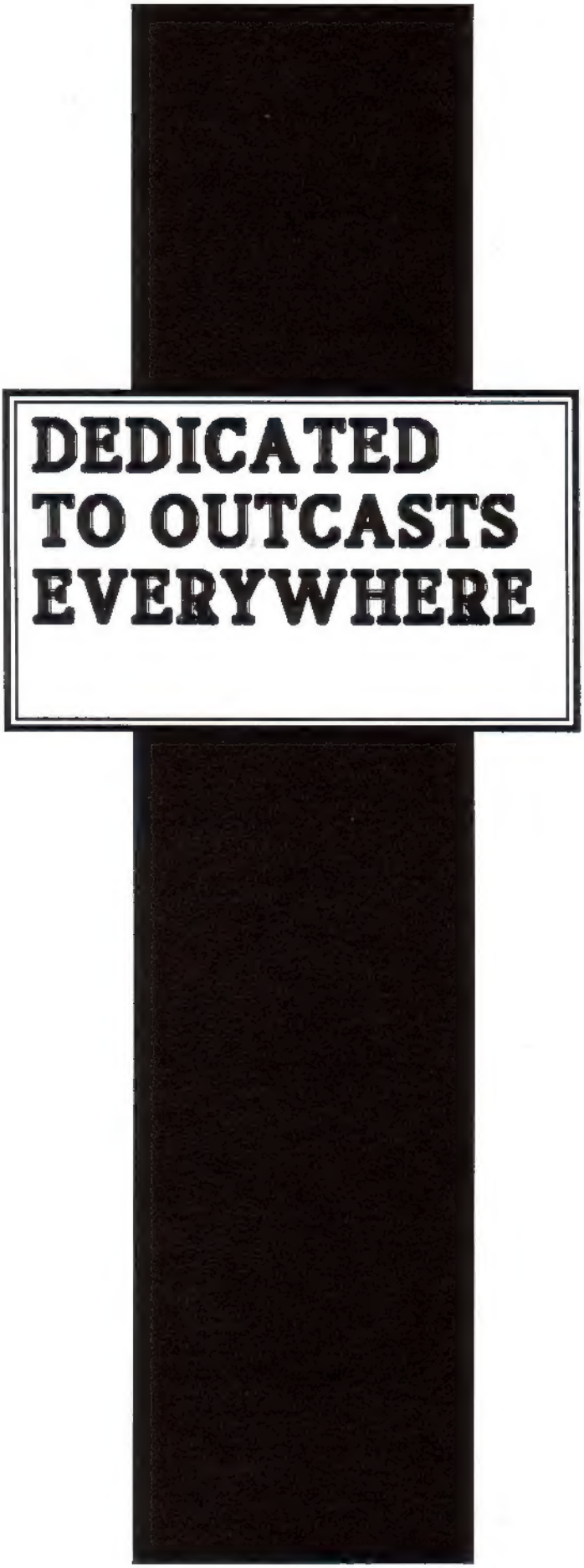

DEDICATED
TO OUTCASTS
EVERYWHERE

THE SENTINEL OF THE SKYWAYS

ISSUES
#1 through #9

INTRODUCTION TO THE SILVER SURFER: A CRITICAL REVIEW

When The Silver Surfer first appeared in **Fantastic Four #48**, no one suspected that Lee and Kirby had come up with yet another new star in the Marvel firmament. He was as outrageous as any other character in Marvel Comics, but that didn't mean that he'd become any more popular than Ant Man.

The character was essentially created by Jack Kirby who took the plot involving Galactus and decided to give him a herald, which he called The Surfer. Stan Lee was so captivated by this character that he decided he should be more important than that, and in the process changed his name to make him more exciting. By the end of that first Galactus saga, the stage had been set for 20 years of Silver Surfer adventures as he had been marooned on Earth with a strange race called humans who either feared the Surfer or attempted to exploit him. Time and again the Surfer was thrust into contact with the worst

elements of humankind until Norrin Radd's viewpoint was corrupted into thinking that the entire race was beyond salvation. Only occasional contacts with people like Al Harper (**Silver Surfer #5,** 1968) gave him hope that mankind was more noble in spirit than he had thought.

Throughout the years the Surfer remained a noble but alienated man. Even when he was part of The Defenders, which at times included another strange outcast named The Hulk, he seemed aloof and apart.

For many years the Surfer seemed in limbo, despite still appearing in stories. This is because the character was not allowed to advance the way other Marvel characters had. Stan Lee felt a special affection for the Surfer and wanted to write the ultimate Surfer story himself. At one point it seemed that this had been done when Stan Lee and Jack Kirby collaborated on a Silver Surfer graphic

novel in the Seventies which freed the tortured Norrin Radd from Earth. Great! But Marvel Comics continued along as though the book had never existed and the continuity at Marvel did not reflect the events portrayed in the Silver Surfer graphic novel. For this reason the story stands today as an aberration ignored by all those who chronicle the Surfer's tales, and in fact Marvel did not officially free the Surfer from Earth until 1987, over ten years after the very different events chronicled in the graphic novel.

Today the Surfer is a free spirit, roaming the vastness of outer space just as he had always dreamed of doing again, but between the time when he was the herald of Galactus and when he became the guardian of the space lanes as he's seen today in his own magazine, the Surfer had another run in eighteen issues of his own title where we saw him explore this world and the people whom

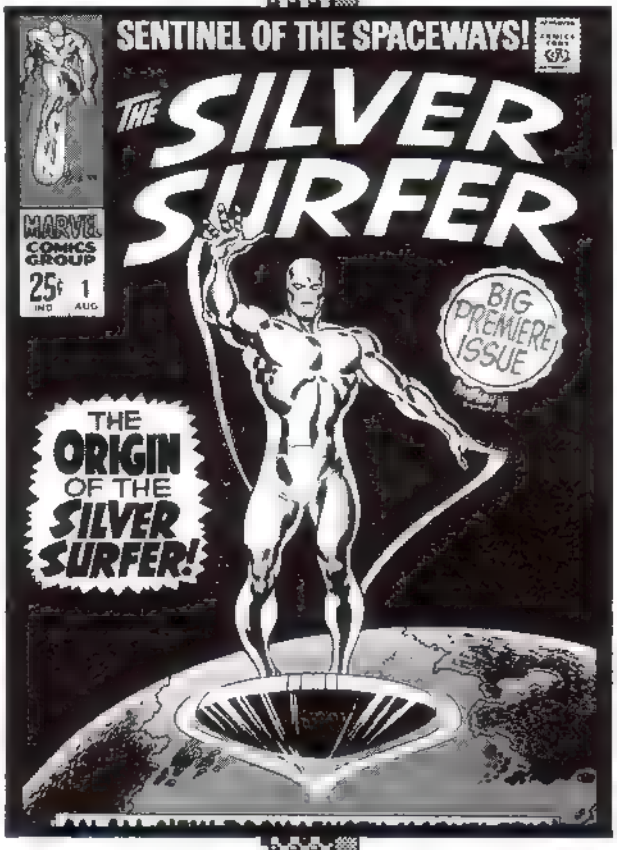
he had sought to defend, and at times he'd wonder why he had bothered while at other times his decision would be reinforced. It was a strange time in the life of Norrin Radd. It was the version of the Silver Surfer as he was seen even after that book was cancelled. This was the definitive Surfer.

SILVER SURFER I

Writer: Stan Lee
Penciller: John Buscema
Inker: Sal Buscema

The story opens with The Surfer yet again performing a good deed and aiding a human in need. When a manned space capsule crashes into the ocean and sinks, The Surfer detects this and rescues the pilot, Col. Jameson. But upon bringing him to rest on a U>S> aircraft carrier, jets open fire on him and the Surfer speeds away.

This latest encounter with the ungrateful, violent humans causes him to think back to the world of his birth, Zenn-La. It was a world of vast wonders and technological treasures, but because these achievements had all come from past generations, Norrin Radd felt discontented as none of this had been achieved by those who now enjoyed it. He craved more than the empty amusements this life offered him.



He also recalls the treachery he encountered on Earth at the hands of Dr. Doom, and how the Hulk turned against him because of a misunderstanding so that always he would feel alone and unable to trust another human being.

On Zenn-La, even his lover, Shalla Bal recognized that he was unhappy, but he tried to reassure her that it was just a mood. It was then that a gigantic spacecraft was detected which pierced their defenses and was unable to be stopped. When they consulted the computers which ruled them, the answer came back to use the Weapon Supreme. As horrifying as that prospect was, the weapon was deployed and it laid waste to the surface of Zenn-La itself. But when a working telescope was

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found, it was perceived that the invading vessel had merely taken refuge in the Fourth Dimension.

But Norrin Radd would not surrender. He went to a scientist and with a Mental-Constructor they created a small spaceship which Norrin used to fly out and confront the invader. The invader was Galactus and he knew what Norrin Radd wanted, but the galactic being's hunger was too strong to be concerned that this planet was inhabited. He didn't have the time to search space for the proper world. Norrin Radd seizes on this and offers to be that herald. Galactus agrees and in exchange for sparing Zenn-La, Norrin Radd is pledged to work for Galactus for all time.

Norrin Radd returns to bid adieu to Shalla Bal, who pledges undying love for him. But Norrin Radd states that they will never meet again and she cannot go with him, for where the Silver Surfer flies, he flies alone.

And so the Surfer began his quest, finding uninhabited worlds for Galactus until he found Earth, which he could not spare because of his master's all consuming hunger. But there was some glory in these Earth beings that caused him to oppose his master, but it was the intervention of The Watcher and the assistance he gave the Fantastic Four that finally saved both Earth and the Surfer. But because of his rebellion, Galactus robbed the Surfer of his space-time powers and marooned him on Earth.

* * * *

The Silver Surfer had been a big hit after his introduction in **FANTASTIC FOUR** #49 & 50, as well as in his subsequent appearances. He profited from being given his own book at a time when Marvel was experimenting with oversized comics in a twenty-five cent format which contained 49 pages of story plus ads, covers, etc. It is a handsome first issue, featuring art by John Buscema and Joe Sinnott. Although written by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby is the one who established the character, but at the time he was already spread thin on a number of books (**THOR, CAPTAIN AMERICA** and **FANTASTIC FOUR**) and there wasn't room to fit a fourth monthly title into his already packed schedule. But Stan Lee was apparent worried at having another illustrator working on the Surfer, so not only did he choose John Buscema, but he had Kirby's best

inker work on it as well. The result is majestic! One can see the time and care taken on the book. While the story is 36 pages long, it is no more complex than a typical 22 page story, but it expands and captures the grandeur of the character by employing many pages which are 3 and 4 panel pages, allowing the art room to breathe.

There are many scenes which do not advance the plot but which show off the Surfer and give him time to philosophize and engage in his popular monologues in which he makes mordant observations on the violent nature of human kind. He compares them with two Yeti creatures he encounters that attempt to steal his board and finally end up battling one another for possession of the prize which escapes when the Surfer takes his leave of them.

While the opening sequence has the American military taking off after the Surfer and trying to shoot him down, the whole world gets its fair share of blame as he flies over other nations and they attempt to do the same. This contrasts with Norrin Radd's experiences as a man on his home world where he could have everything he could want but was uninterested in it because it was not something he had earned himself. Everything was too easy on Zenn-La. Teaching cubes allowed one to learn whatever one wanted to quickly and easily, and the Cyberno-Materializer (later in the same story called the Mental-Constructor) enables one to create any substance inexpensively just by thinking about it.

We also see the Zenn-La equivalent of Disneyworld as well as a ruling parliament that gives many speeches even though the planet is actually ruled by computers who control the operations of the world. Still, humans are in charge because when it is decided to use the Weapon Supreme, it's humans who must press the button. Isn't it always the way?

And yet, all these glimpses of Zenn-La have a different effect than the one perhaps intended. It shows that Norrin Radd didn't know when he had it so good!! He uses a mental time travel device to glimpse the past of his world and he is entranced by the more adventurous times, and even by the age of enlightenment when men did things on their own and made new discoveries. But does this mean that there is nothing more to discover because of how advanced a society has become? Is art dead? Is there nothing that Norrin Radd

can imagine himself doing other than regressing and being like his adventurous ancestors? Although he feels restless, everyone else on his world seems to find plenty to do. Certainly if he could have a spaceship created for himself in the planet's hour of need, he could have done something similar in order to engage in space exploration on his own? Just because his people as a race are not interested in space exploration doesn't mean that he can't strike out on his own. It's almost as though he preferred to sit and complain about things rather than do something about them. As it was, it took the near destruction of Zenn-La for him to get the gumption to get up and finally do something on his own instead of just complaining about how miserable he was all the time. After being stranded on Earth he went back to complaining all the time, but at least he had a reason. And yet, with the power cosmic, couldn't he have disguised himself as a human and tried to live among them without his alien appearance getting in the way? It had to have gotten pretty boring flying around and around the world endlessly.

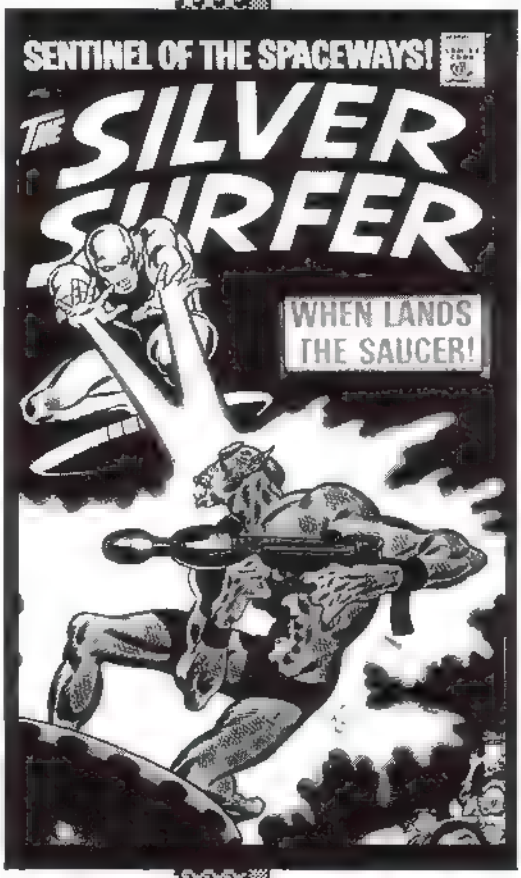
THE SILVER SURFER 2

Writer: Stan Lee
Artist: John Buscema
Inker: Joe Sinnott

The Surfer tires of being alone on Earth and so he decides to go to live among the humans so that he might have a home again. He lands in a remote village in Europe but the people react fearfully to him. One man stands up for the Surfer, but it's clear that he's not welcome there. So the Surfer leaves.

Next he tries an American city but receives the same suspicious greeting and so he angrily flies off. Frustrated he tries to leave Earth, hurling himself against the barrier erected against him by Galactus. Again and again he tries, but the barrier holds.. He thinks of Zenn-La and Shalla Bal and mourns for the fate that has befallen him. But still the Surfer cannot turn his back on humankind so long as they are plagued by poverty, crime and tyranny.

Just then the Surfer detects a spaceship approaching Earth. He follows it down and notes that it is invisible to humans, but not to his cosmic eyes. He lands and tries to warn the people of the threat nearby, but no one believes him. Some think that the Surfer is threatening the crowd and attack him until the police arrive and he's hauled off to jail. In his cell he contemplates the madness of this people whom he wants to help. He summons his board and casually breaks out of his cell, flying to investigate the spacecraft.



A door opens in the craft and the Surfer enters. The lizard-like beings call themselves the Badoon and one guides him through the ship, trying to convince the Surfer of the purity of their intentions. Just then a woman appears who is a prisoner of the Badoon. She tells the Surfer that these beings plan to invade, but a ray gun blast shuts her up. The Badoon allow the Surfer to leave with the injured girl but vow to pursue him in 24 hours.

The Surfer leaves the young woman in a cosmic field high above the Earth where she will be safe until he can return to assist her. Then he goes to observe the Badoon to

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learn what he can of their power. The aliens emerge from their craft and move invisibly among the humans, even shooting one of them to prove how stupid, helpless and unaware they are of the menace of the Badoon. They then return to their vessel and begin to hunt the Surfer as he provides more sport for them.

The Silver Surfer easily outmaneuvers the missile they send after him and he then orders the Badoon to leave Earth. Furious, their leader unleashes the Weapon of Weapons, which is a strange looking robot. The Surfer battles it over the city, but no one can see it except him and so it appears as though the Surfer is running wild again. But he puts up a tremendous fight until finally the Badoon recall their Weapon of Weapon to prevent the Surfer form destroying it. But the military thinks that the Surfer has been menacing the city and so they prepare to attack him.

He follows the spacecraft so that when the military unleashes their missiles against him, the Badoon think that the weapons are aimed at them, that their invisibility has failed, and so they flee Earth and call off their invasion.

The spacecraft is inside a force field and the Surfer penetrates it in the hope that he can escape the barrier in this way. But at the last minute he remembers the young woman he had placed in a force field until he could help her and so reluctantly pulls back and goes to her aid. He takes her down into a remote region, but before he can help her the military find him and drive him off, thinking that he had captured her with some idea of doing her harm. Furiously the Surfer flies off, knowing that he could never convince these people of the truth, but the woman will recover although one wonders if the Surfer will?

****

It seems no matter what the Surfer tries that it never works out for him. One element of this, though, is a bit contrived here. If the young woman was injured, why would he try to help her right away instead of sticking her in a force field to be forgotten until he has to give up his only chance of leaving Earth in order to go back to help her. And then he doesn't even get the chance to because the military drives him off. Still, when she recovers she'll know the truth, not that anyone would believe her. After all, who would believe about an alien invasion in a world which contains The Avengers, The Fantastic Four, Dr. Strange and a whole pack of super villains? But then people are always finding such things too fantastic when in actuality the world would be viewed in a very different context by people if so many super beings were running around.

No time element is ever really established between when the Surfer

SILVER SURFER

left Zenn-La and when he arrived on Earth. It must not have been too long as we see in this issue that Shalla Bal is still pining away for him as though he hadn't been gone very long, but then as we'll see it is important that it's established that she's still alive and remembers him.

On the other hand it could be that the people of Zenn-La live extended lives, something that Norrin Radd might take for granted and not have mentioned when he thought of his origins in issue number one.

The Surfer does a lot of hand wringing and blaming the humans for his predicament, getting angry at their suspicious nature, but on the other hand he bears an equal share of the blame. It even mentions in this issue that in **FANTASTIC FOUR** #72 the Surfer decided that the humans needed some worldwide threat to unify them and make them forget their petty differences and so the Surfer decided to become that menace. It was the intervention of the Fantastic Four that headed that off. But people remember what the Surfer did and later in the story when he's fighting the invisible "Weapon of Weapons" of the Badoon, people think that the Surfer is running wild again and call the authorities.

What the Surfer needs is good public relations and one wonders why he doesn't go to the only people who even partially understand him, The Fantastic Four. He could stay with them and they could establish the Surfer with the public as a hero rather than as a menace. For someone with the power cosmic, the Surfer isn't particularly bright in some ways. But he does have a good heart, and the fact that he doesn't blame the innocent and the helpless for the excesses of the others goes a long way towards showing that he has character.

So far as aliens go, the Badoon seem like little more than another version of the Skrulls. They're green, warlike and treacherous. Other than not being able to change their form, they act just like the Skrulls.

Something interesting to note is that this Surfer story is 40 pages long and it is divided into two 20 page chapters, as though it had originally been conceived of going into two regular sized comics instead of in one giant comic. It certainly makes it easy to divide for reprints years later. What also leads one to this observation is that the page is even constructed like a splash page rather than like a chapter page.

John Buscema's art is still excellent here, employing large, sweeping panels such as when the Surfer is in space at the beginning of the story and when he is fighting the Badoon on pages 27 and 28. Buscema and Sinnott for an excellent team, but since musical artists has always been a common event at Marvel, the team doesn't last long. Buscema is illustrating very much in the Kirby mold, since that ap-

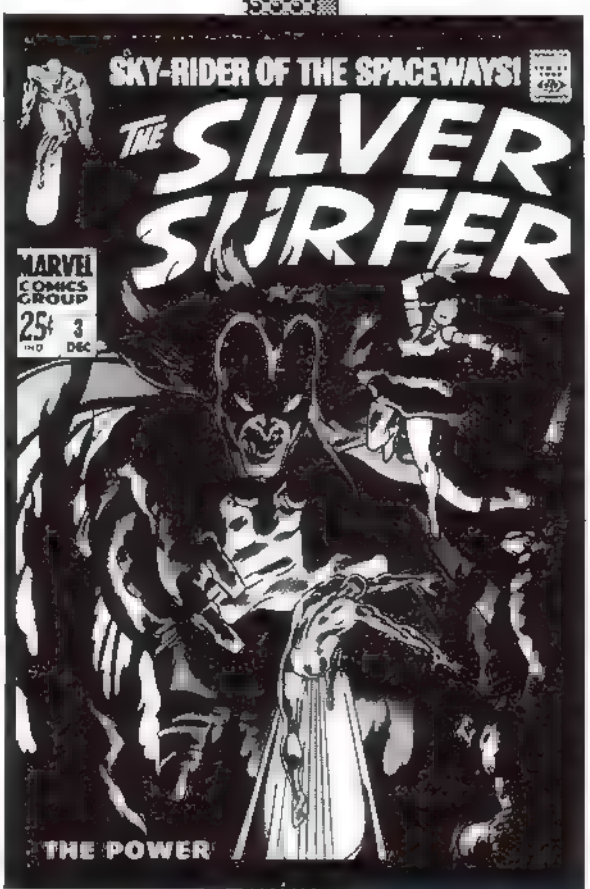
proach to superheroes is what made Marvel a hit in the Sixties. Only Steve Ditko never tried to alter his art to fit into the Marvel style, which is what made his books stand out apart from the others.

A common theme in the Surfer comics is the hatred and fear infecting humanity, how that no matter where he went in the world, people were basically the same, that is to say, no damn good. People who stood up for the Surfer's side are always portrayed as the exception. And so story after story the very people the Surfer selflessly aids always drive him away. Even the Badoon get into the act when they leave by observing that by the time they return the humans will probably have killed the Surfer even though he could have been their greatest defender. It makes you wonder whether maybe we deserve the Badoon! At one point the Surfer states, in one of his frequent monologues, "Never have I known a race so filled with fear. . . with dark distrust. . . with the seeds of smoldering violence. . . as this. . . which calls itself. . . Humanity!" This theme is repeated endlessly throughout the series. On the other hand, since this was published in the Sixties, at a time of social upheaval and self-awareness, it may very well have been a product of the times since that was very much a period of cleansing of the national psyche as people strived to better themselves and better the country as they saw it. One could easily look at the Surfer as not so much a commentary on mankind as a race so much as a commentary on the times we were living in then. Some aspects of this approach will be reflected in subsequent stories in the series.

SILVER SURFER 3

Writer: Stan Lee
Penciller: John Buscema
Inker: Joe Sinnott

The Surfer tracks the wounded girl from last issue down to a hospital where she lays near death. The military had driven him off before he could heal her with his cosmic energy. She is under guard because the authorities still believe that it is the Silver Surfer who injured her. They know nothing about the Badoon aliens who'd held her prisoner.



He uses his cosmic energy on the young woman , destroys the weapons of the police who have been attacking him and then leaves, vowing vengeance on on the violent, suspicious human race.

Flying high above the Earth, the Surfer uses the power cosmic to enshroud the Earth in darkness as he neutralizes all power across the globe all communications and controls of any sort become useless in the shadow of the Surfer's fury.

This activity comes to the attention of Mephisto, master of the dark realm, who draws his subjects from those humans who are susceptible to greed and avarice. He doesn't want anything to happen to them for that reason. Searching with his enchanted mists, he encounters the figure of the Surfer and recognizes him for the martyr that he is.

Mephisto does not want to see one so noble walk among the humans that he exploits, so he embarks on a plan to learn the Surfer's weakness. Through his powers he learns of Shalla Bal and so appears on Zenn-La where he convinces the woman to come with him if she should ever see the Surfer again. He takes her aboard

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a spacecraft which approaches Earth after the Surfer releases the world from the grip of his vengeance. When the military sees the UFO they believe that what they just experienced was the beginning of an invasion and fires missiles at it. The Surfer destroys the missiles from one base but others get through and down the craft.

Norrin Radd recognizes the design of a craft from Zenn-La and when he comes upon the down craft he finds Shalla Bal aboard. Shocked and amazed, he quickly uses his power to heal her. As she regains consciousness she warns him of Mephisto and that she is his pawn against the Surfer.

Mephisto appears before them and threatens the Surfer because he is a threat to all the dark lord holds dear. He then vanishes and takes Shalla Bal with him.

The demon lord is not in his dark regions long before the Surfer appears. The fact that he could have followed Mephisto at all startles the crimson monarch. But the Surfer can follow a mote of dust through space and has powers that Mephisto is unaware of.

Mephisto shows the Surfer that he has Shalla Bal in a place of safety and then proceeds to tempt the former herald of Galactus. He offers treasure and women more beautiful than Shalla Bal, but the Surfer is uninterested in these things. When that fails he has his minions attack the Surfer until finally Mephisto has him helpless. He then reduces his prisoner to a form small enough to imprison in his brain so that Mephisto can more easily corrupt him. But the Surfer resists until finally Mephisto must eject the other from his brain due to the pain induced by his purity.

When offered the chance of serving Mephisto and being with Shalla Bal or turning away from him and losing her forever, she begs the Surfer not to accept as their love is not worth the price of his soul. The Surfer reaches for her hand to touch it one last time, but Mephisto sends her back to Zenn-La, as he knew the demon would. But at least she is safe, although the Surfer is once more alone.

* * * *

The introduction of Mephisto, the villain who would become the primary nemesis of the Surfer. Some think that he menaced the Surfer a bit too often, and usually in the same manner, by taunting him with Shalla Bal. The new Silver Surfer series which is running

will supposedly not employ Mephisto at all because he has been so overused in the past. But the character was fresh and new in 1968 and was the first time that Marvel came up with a character who was clearly supposed to be Satan, as Mephistopheles is just one of the many names the lord of Hell uses. That he talks with such obvious lines as , "So long as I can appeal to man's basest instincts, to his greed, his envy, his hatreds and aggression, his fear and distrust of his fellow man, so long as man takes the law into his own hands, both in the streets and on the field of battle, and so long as crime covers the planet like a deadly, creeping fungus, then only Mephisto shall reap the final, eternal reward!" Yeah, I think we know who this is. He's repelled by the Surfer's purity and even tries to win his soul as killing him would not be enough.

The reference about man taking the law into his own hands in the streets can also be applied to superheroes, you know. Does this mean that Spider-Man is damned to Hell for all eternity? Maybe he'll run into Kraven the Hunter there.

Mephisto's temptations of the Surfer and an obvious parallel to the temptations of Christ by Satan from the Bible.

The plot of this story is somewhat circular in that that opens with the Surfer helping a young woman and ends the same way. The young woman at the open of the story is the one he tried to aid last issue after she had been wounded by the Badoon and then in the end he helps Shalla Bal by tricking Mephisto into sending her back to Zenn-La so that she is out of his clutches, at least for the time being. Mephisto fears the goodness in the Surfer and is concerned that it could infect humanity and thus deprive him of the many corrupt souls he is accustomed to receiving. In fact his acquisition of souls is at its height as men who will sell out other men, rob and cheat them of their due, is at its height. He counts on the men who delude themselves into thinking that by cheating someone through legal, though highly unethical, means that it is just strictly business and means nothing. But these are the souls most quickly consigned to Mephisto's fires.

The art by Buscema and Sinnott is once more superlative. Page 8 which introduces Mephisto is fantastic and demonstrates why Buscema became a star at Marvel so quickly in the late Sixties. He truly excels at this type of material. The rest of the issue tells the story

with many four panel pages, thus allowing the art room to breathe and take advantage of the material being illustrated. The larger panels makes the story itself that much more powerful as images are not crowded into pages too cramped to really enjoy.

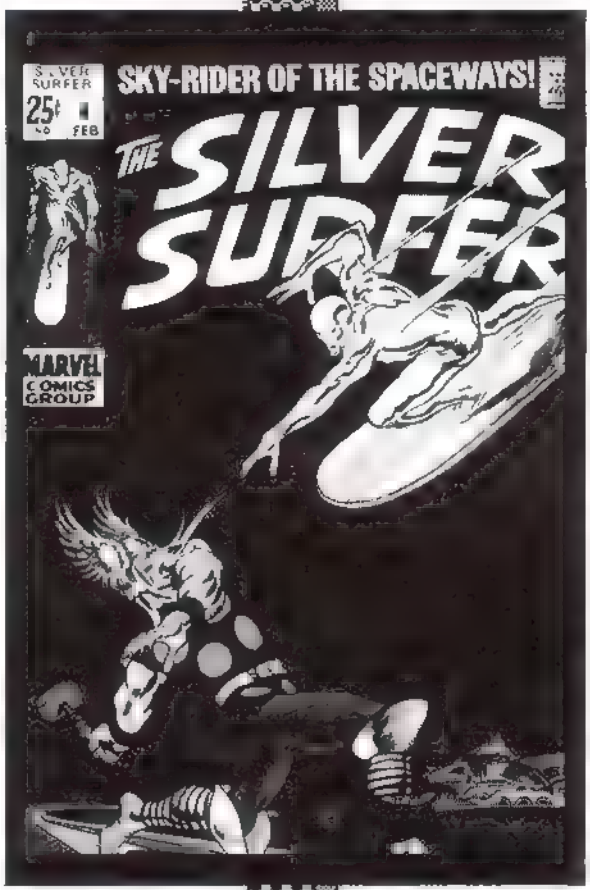
The sudden appearance of the Surfer in Mephisto's realm at the bottom of page 22 is another beautiful page, perfectly balanced and composed to achieve maximum impact. The scenes on Mephisto's realm flow together until suddenly the silhouette of the Silver Surfer glimpsed looking down on Mephisto creates a dramatic halt so that we share the surprise of the dark lord. The issue is filled with wonderful compositions such as these. Truly the Surfer was at his height in this issue and scenes such as this demonstrate why his comic is so fondly remembered still after almost 20 years.

SILVER SURFER 4

Writer: Stan Lee
Penciller: John Buscema
Inker: Sal Buscema

In Asgard, Loki broods over his inability to defeat his brother, Thor. Finally he decides that what he cannot do directly, perhaps he can accomplish indirectly. Using a potion he sets free his Mystic essence to search the cosmos for a pawn. The Hulk has great strength, but is lacking in skill. The Thing is strong, but is still too mortal. Hercules is powerful enough, but Loki does not wish to incite Olympus against himself.

Then suddenly he sees a stranger, a being high above Earth who keeps hurling himself against an invisible barrier. To learn more about this creature, Loki pierces the mists of the past and learns the Surfer's origin. When he sees that the Surfer's love, Shalla Bal, was left behind on his home world, Loki considers tempting the Surfer by offering to reunite them in exchange for aiding him against the god of Thunder. But then further revelations show that Mephisto attempted something similar without success. So Loki knows that he must use trickery.



In Asgard, Loki rides past Fandral and other of Thor's friends and boasts to them that he finally has a plan to successfully vanquish Thor. When Thor is told of this they all decide that they must prepare for battle to meet whatever Loki would send against them.

Loki observes this and is pleased that Thor is reacting as expected. The god of evil then leaves to search for the Surfer.

At the moment, the Surfer has chosen to withdraw from the world of men and live among the wild beasts of Africa. Among them he finds peace and contentment,

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not the violence and avarice of the world of men.

Suddenly Loki appears and taunts the Surfer, proclaiming that he is a god against which the Surfer can do naught but bow down. He attacks and stuns the Surfer, but cannot wound him as the man's metal skin is too powerful. When he leaves the stunned Surfer behind, Norrin Radd knows that he must follow else mankind might be at the mercy of such a powerful being.

Loki arrives in a city and begins wrecking havoc, but the Surfer arrives to confront him. Their battle is fierce but finally it ends in a draw. He tells the Surfer that he has passed the test. that he was searching for someone to confront the evil Thor who plots to overthrow the rightful ruler of Asgard. To prove this he shows the Surfer the image of Thor assembling an army, but the Surfer doesn't realize that Thor is preparing to defend himself from what he thinks will be an attack by Loki.

The Surfer is unfamiliar with Asgard and its inhabitants, and so is easily convinced. Plus if the Surfer succeeds in stopping Thor, Loki promises to free the Surfer from Earth as no mystic barrier can stand against the power of a god.

Loki takes the Surfer to Asgard and then leaves him so that he can enter unencumbered. Since he is weaponless, the guard of the Rainbow Bridge allows him to pass.

The Silver Surfer finds Thor at a huge banquet surrounded by friends and decides to meet with him and learn more about him first. Thor and the Surfer eye one another, each trying to learn more about the other.

A tournament is held in the hall and Loki uses this moment to enter in his invisible spirit form. First he places suspicions in the Surfer's mind and then compels the winner of the tournament to use the sword he was just given by Thor to hurl at the Surfer and call out that it is done in the name of Thor. Loki uses his powers to prevent the Surfer from hearing Thor's denials and instead attacks. Thor holds back but finally must defend himself and attacks.

The Surfer presses his attack and is even more successful because Loki has merged his power with the Silver Surfer's to guarantee Thor's downfall.

Their battle is mighty but finally as the Surfer is on the verge of winning he guesses the truth and in fury Loki banishes the Surfer back to Earth where he is trapped behind the barrier of Galactus once more. But Thor has recognized the

valor of the Surfer and will not forget it.

* * * *

Back in the Sixties it was commonplace for Marvel's heroes to periodically fight each other and it was always because of some convoluted misunderstanding. Still, this is actually one of the better such stories as we really are kept guessing by what Loki is doing and how his plots and counterplots will tie together, and it is handled quite cleverly. There has been some discussion as to how much Stan Lee really wrote in the Sixties, as books such as **THE FANTASTIC FOUR** and **SPIDER-MaN** clearly altered in style of storytelling when the original artists on the books departed. But John Buscema has never claimed to be a co-writer of any sort and Stan Lee's scripts on these early issues of the Surfer are very tight and well worked out, certainly still very much in the tradition of Marvel's glory days. They definitely hold up even after nearly twenty years.

This story was done at the time when Asgard still seemed very mystical and mysterious and not overburdened with too much fantastic baggage so as to make it too far removed to identify with. In the Sixties Asgard seemed no more overtly mystical than the age of Prince Valiant, and the characters in the stories were more of the focus than the fantastic events. The emphasis here on Loki gives more of a Dr. Strange feel to the proceedings, and again makes one wonder why those two have not crossed paths more often than they have..

On the terrestrial side, we see the Surfer in a completely new setting on Earth as well. The scene.on page 10 of him in the jungle where he sits side by side with a huge lion is actually very idyllic and peaceful so that we wish to see more such scenes. The large panel of him surrounded by many creatures has an almost fairy tale air to it and is well composed by John Buscema. The creatures around him all seem very much at peace, and even happy, as though his company is more than accepted by them. The panel in which the Surfer strokes the sleepy lion is particularly effective.

When Loki appears it is as though he is the serpent in the garden, bringing with him pain and unhappiness. His first act is to attack the Surfer and lay him low, thus setting into motion the events which will lead him away from contentment and once more find

him being manipulated and attacked, misunderstood and misused.

The art by the Buscema brothers is very nice, certainly equal to what Joe Sinnott had accomplished in inking John's work. The panels on page two and three of Loki entering his cave and using his magic spells perfectly capture the essence of the scene, particularly panel 3 on page 3. This is far superior to the inking that Sal Buscema is doing on John Buscema's pencils today. This work on **SILVER SURFER** #4 is both powerful and beautiful, capturing both the Silver Surfer and Thor at their best. Even though Jack Kirby was the artist of choice for Thor in those days, Buscema captures a different Thor, one who is both man and god even though he never once is seen as Don Blake. We can see beneath the proud features to the heart underneath.

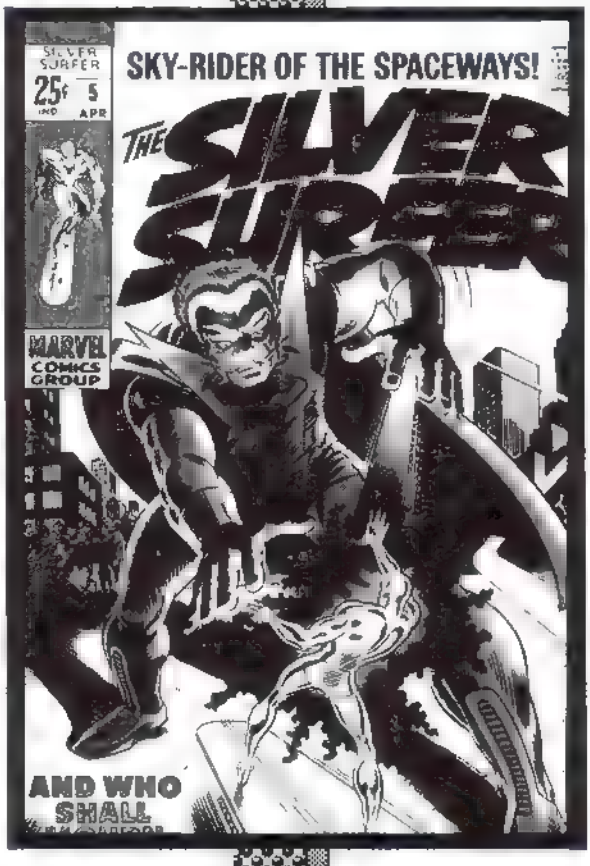
The scene of Thor in the banquet hall on page 23 has the composition of a page by Hal Foster and shows Buscema's work at its height. We can feel the creative energy reverberating in this story and any up-and-coming artist could do worse than to study these panels and how they are constructed, and how the characters relate and the story flows. There is movement in these pages which in later years would all too often be heartlessly imitated so that it looked familiar without capturing the spark of true passion.

This issue marks a departure in that the Surfer does not once come into conflict with humans, although he still complains about them a lot.

SILVER SURFER 5

Writer: Stan Lee
Artist: John Buscema
Inker: Sal Buscema

In the Baxter Building headquarters of the Fantastic Four, an intruder alert sounds. Someone is in the lab. Ben Reed and Johnny race to the lab and arrive too late. Whoever was there has fled and taken the Space-Scrambler with them. Since they fled via a window, Johnny Storm tries to follow but cannot catch up with their mystery intruder. Whoever it is has flown too fast and too far into the upper reaches of the atmosphere for The Human Torch to follow.



The culprit turns out to be the Silver Surfer, but the Fantastic Four don't know this. The Surfer hopes that this device will pierce the barrier erected against him by Galactus. He chose not to ask Reed Richards outright if he could borrow it for fear of being turned down. But what the Surfer doesn't know is that the device is not perfected and when he activates it the Space Scrambler explodes!!

The next thing the Surfer knows he is sitting up in bed. Was this all a dream? No, he had fallen from the sky and was found by Al Harper, a physicist whose hobby is rock hunting and who happened to be out in the wood when the Surfer practically fell in his lap. Being Black, Harper is more sensitive than most about judging people by their appearance, and so he took the Surfer home to try to help him.

The Surfer explains his plight to Harper who thinks that he might be able to come up with something to help the Surfer, but he needs money.

Disguising himself with some of Harper's clothes, the Surfer goes out and looks for work. He can't get

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any sort of regular job because he has no background, references or permanent address. He briefly toys with robbing a bank but then thinks better of it before completing the crime.

When he finds a man beaten in an alley, he learns that the man had been thrown out of an illegal gambling den when he discovered he was being cheated. The Surfer is intrigued and he asks the man to teach him the rules of this game.

Still disguised as a human, the Surfer enters the gambling den and proceeds to win every throw of the dice by using his powers to manipulate them. The owners are not entertained and when the Surfer leaves with his winnings he is set upon and beaten. But after gauging the savagery of these men, the Surfer fights back and defeats them, retrieving his winnings and splitting it with the man he'd found in the alley.

Returning to Al Harper, he gives him the money and the man begins working long hours until he comes up with a device which will confuse the field so that the Surfer might penetrate it.

But as luck would have it, The Stranger is approaching Earth and is attracted by this activity. He has returned to Earth to destroy humanity because of what he perceives as their rampant greed and hatred. He will be planting a Null-Life Bomb on Earth which will destroy all life on the planet when detonated. The Stranger advises the Surfer to flee since he is not of these people.

The Surfer goes to Al Harper and tells him what he knows, but Harper cannot get any of the authorities to believe him. Using a device Harper has for detecting meteorites, they go in search of the bomb. When they are near it, Harper goes after the bomb while the Surfer goes after The Stranger.

In his battle with The Stranger, the Surfer learns that the bomb has a device which will kill anyone who tampers with it, but the alien will not allow the Surfer time to warn his friend.

Harper finds the bomb and when it releases a vapor which begins attacking him, he doesn't halt his attempts to disarm it and finally he succeeds, but at the cost of his own life.

When The Stranger realizes that the bomb has been deactivated he alters his view of humanity since there had been one willing to sacrifice his own life for the rest of mankind. And so The Stranger leaves Earth once more.

Al Harper is found and giv-

en a funeral, and although no one knows that he died saving humanity, the Surfer knows and he creates an eternal flame to burn on Al Harper's grave.

* * * *

What I want to know is, when The Surfer went looking for a job, what name did he put on the application? Norrin Radd? If so, didn't anyone question what kind of a name that was?

Although the Surfer cheats at dice in order to win, it's established that he's cheating the cheaters, so apparently that's supposed to be okay.

When The Surfer learns that The Stranger is threatening Earth, why doesn't he go to someone like The Fantastic Four who are better prepared to deal with something like that? The Surfer is familiar with them and knows that they are trustworthy. While he may feel guilty over stealing Reed Richards Space Scrambler, surely such feelings can be put aside when the safety of the entire human race is at stake. It seems inconsistent to have the Surfer in contact with the Fantastic Four several times in that title before the Surfer gets his own magazine, and then have them at the beginning of this issue only to ignore them with a world threatening menace occurs.

Speaking of world threatening menaces, The Watcher stepped in to protect our world and contact the FF when Galactus was approaching, but when The Stranger threatens to destroy the human race The Watcher is silent and unheard from except in the backup feature in this very magazine!

This is an odd story in that the first half deals only with the Surfer's desire to help Al Harper create a device to help him escape, but then halfway through the story the Stranger shows up and a completely different plot takes over. The Surfer stops using the device to try to slip through the barrier and then proceeds to save the Earth. At the end of the story all thought of the device Al Harper built is forgotten and in issue 6 the Surfer refers to it as an experiment that failed only we never saw The Surfer actually complete his attempt to use it.

When this comic was published in 1969, Black characters in comics were still pretty new. Marvel was also at the forefront of doing socially conscious stories until DC embarked on this as well as year later. But the use of the character is not overbearing and it still stands up today as Al Harp-

er just mentions that he understands what it's like being judged by how you look. The only thing cliche about it is the fact that he's a physicist as Black characters at the time tended to be portrayed as very upscale in often in superior jobs rather than as just ordinary people perhaps to counteract the negative stereotypes which predominated for years. It's still a better portrayal than Ebony in **THE SPIRIT** ever was.

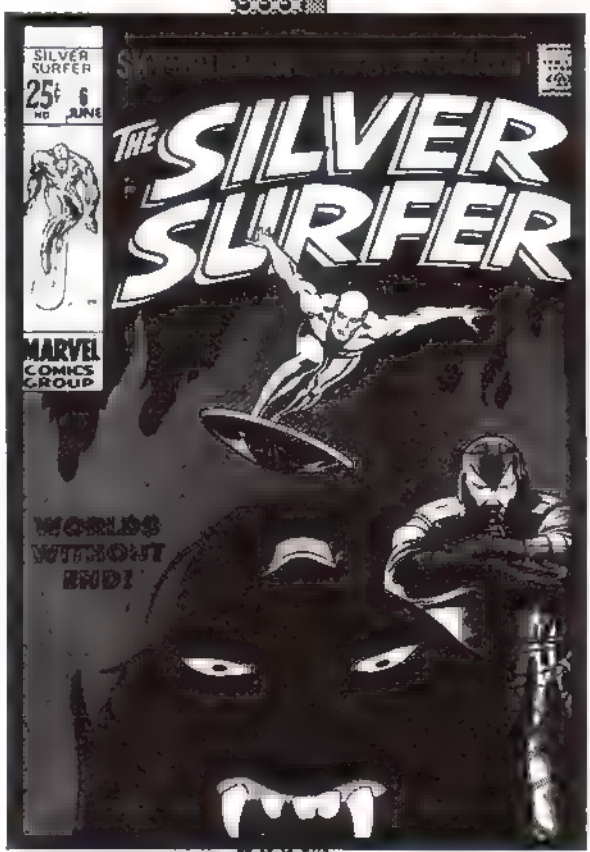
The art by Buscema and Buscema in this issue looks much more ordinary than anything in the book so far. Panels and pages are not as carefully composed and the art has a somewhat rushed look in spots. It's not really bad artwork so much as it's just average. But the story is strong and that overcomes some of those drawbacks. It's still an excellent issue and a good entry in the series.

SILVER SURFER 6

Writer: Stan Lee
Penciller: John Buscema
Inker: Sal Buscema

The Surfer is mourning over being trapped on Earth when he decides to visit the home of Al Harper, the man who died helping the Surfer save the Earth from The Stranger.

In Harper's lab, the Surfer examines the scientist's notes and realizes that exceeding the speed of light will bridge the gap of time. By doing rapid orbits around Earth, The Surfer does burst through the time barrier, but he finds the Earth lifeless, and in ruins. It's the same at other planets he visits, including his beloved Zenn-La.



Finally he finds primitive life on a world that fights to capture him for their master, The Overlord. The Surfer doesn't resist as the destruction he has witnessed has taken the heart out of him and he no longer cares what happens to himself.

When The Surfer is taken before The Overlord, he is confronted with a giant, barely human mutant whose left arm is a claw instead of a hand. It is a powerful being who boasts about conquering the universe and destroying countless worlds.

The Overlord is a mutant born

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as the result of his father's exposure to radiation at one of the last atomic piles. The Overlord places no value on life and has many captives. When The Surfer momentarily mistakes a dancing girl for Shalla-Bal, the Overlord demonstrates his contempt for life by killing her when The Surfer condemns The Overlord and all he represents. In the fierce battle that follows, The Surfer is defeated.

The man put in charge of preparing the Surfer for disintegration recognizes him as this man is the last survivor of Zenn-La and the Surfer is strong in their legends. The man uses his devices to revive the Surfer and then hides him while telling Norrin Radd all he knows about The Overlord's origins.

But The Overlord has been spying on them and attacks, killing the man who helped The Surfer. But now The Silver Surfer knows what he must do as he has a plan to reshape the universe.

Breaking the speed of light again, The Surfer travels into the past this time and prevents the accident which would cause the birth of The Overlord. This causes the Overlord to cease to exist and changes the shape of the future so that it was never conquered and destroyed. The Surfer then returns to his own time.

****

The Surfer has discovered that by flying at the speed of light he can break the time barrier. In the future the barrier of Galactus no longer blocks his way. While the future he encounters first is unpleasant, what is there to stop him from returning to

the future again and leaving Earth, and then journeying back to his own time? As it si the ending of this story doesn't make any sense because after the Surfer prevents the atomic accident which would have created The Overlord, he is still in the future and could return to his own time out in space, not around the Earth. There's just no reason why he would deliberately return to his place of confinement. He faster-that-light experiment is a success. He should be free. It's confusing why he is not. It's almost as though Stan Lee realized at the last minute that he had done too good a job coming up with a way for the Surfer to be free Earth and had to hurry up at get him back. It's at this point that the series starts to unravel as he should have left Earth now, not returned. Everything after this are just artificial constraints. The Surfer is free. We know it. We don't know why he's not shown as being free. The stories which follow just belabor the idea of the Surfer trapped on Earth. What should have followed are stories of the Surfer in space, such as the new series is doing. The ending of "World's Without End" is a very clumsy mistake.

This would have been the perfect story for freeing the Surfer from Earth as it would have happened within the context of him saving the future of the universe. What could be more dramatic than that.

Having the Overlord the conqueror of the "universe" tends to push our credulity a bit too much as the universe is supposedly infinite and so how could the Overlord conquer something which is infinite? Had they said the known universe or the gal-

axy, even that would have been almost too vast to comprehend, but the universe? I think the Overlord rates himself a bit too highly.

Early in the story is a sequence in which we once again see Shalla Bal pining away for the Surfer as she says that his absent love will sustain her for all the days of her life. I guess she must have gotten over that.

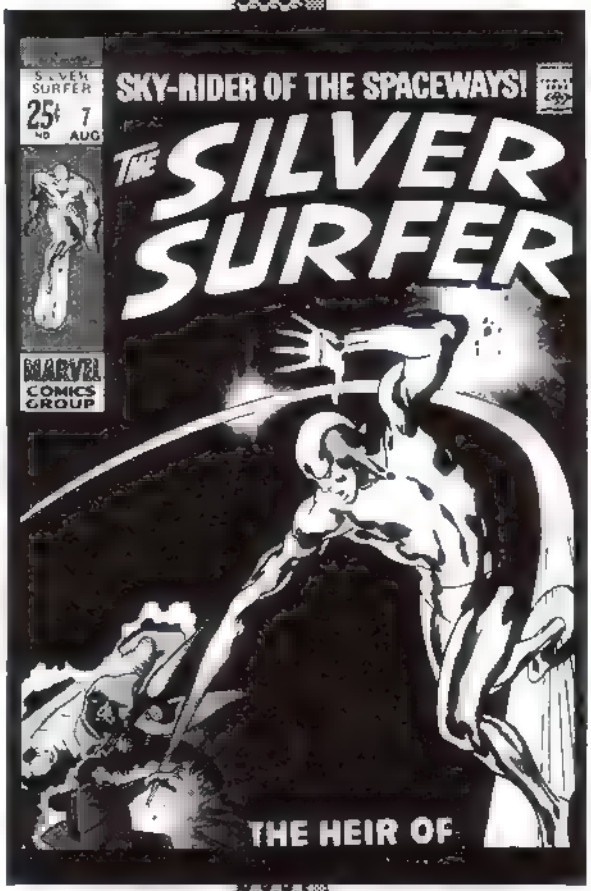
We also see the Surfer examining the device which Al Harper built for him and which supposedly failed. But in issue 5 the Surfer never got a chance to fully test it before The Stranger showed up. Had The Stranger destroyed it, that would be one thing, but The Surfer never even really put the mechanism to the test.

That makes two issues in a row with important plot holes regarding the Surfer's attempts to free himself from Earth.

SILVER SURFER 7

Writer: Stan Lee
Penciller: John Buscema
Inker: Sal Buscema

In the alps, the descendant of Victor Frankenstein is following in his ancestor's footsteps as he tries yet again to infuse dead tissues with life. Again he fails, but the villagers have seen the lights at the castle and the bursts of electricity and they know what is afoot. The villagers attack the castle and set fire to it, but as luck would have it the Silver Surfer sees the flames and that a mob is threatening the people in the castle. All too sensitive to his attacks by mob mentalities, the Surfer sides with the oppressed. He puts out the fire and drives the villagers away.



Herr Frankenstein welcomes the Surfer to the castle and tries to win his trust. He knows how the Surfer has been treated by humanity and hopes to use that to win him over to his side. The Surfer explains that he no longer can take people at their word as once he trusted a man named Dr. Doom and suffered for that trust. Finally the Surfer tires of the man's prattling and chooses to leave. But Dr. Frankenstein vows to have the Surfer as his test subject for Experiment X.

Borgo, the man's misshapen assistant, fears Experiment X as it goes further than anything that his

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ancestors have ever done. He makes one final test in which he transfers the persona of a wolf into a rabbit, and the rabbit into a wolf. Borgo is attacked by the rabbit but the doctor kills the rabbit to save him. Borgo knows that it is because the man could never find another assistant who would put up with what Borgo does at the arrogant scientist's hands.

Finally all is in readiness and the doctor uses a tremendous beam of light to attract the Surfer's attention. When he arrives back at the castle the scientist explains that he has created a ray that will drive all evil from men's minds and thus end crime and war in the world, but he needs the Surfer to test it on before he feels that he can safely use it on a normal human. The Surfer reluctantly agrees but finds that he has once more been duped as Frankenstein uses the machine to create a duplicate of the Surfer with all of his cosmic powers, but one that is evil and under the mad scientist's control.

The duplicate Surfer knocks out the real one and then goes to the village where he terrorizes the people into submission to his master.

Meanwhile, Frankenstein tries to kill the real Silver Surfer but finds that he is impervious to ordinary weapons. He flies to the village and confronts his evil double and a battle rages which goes even into space.

The villagers get their courage back and try to raid the castle again. When Frankenstein tries to shoot them, Borgo can stand no more and attacks him so that they both fall from a tower window to their deaths.

The two Surfers arrive at a major city and continue their attack where the real Surfer finally wins, but the military doesn't know what has happened and so they fire on him again until he flees. The real Surfer was able to defeat his double because his compassion for humanity

gave him the strength he needed in the end.

****

Although this story is well written, it remains a cliche nonetheless. Whenever a series is running out of ideas it seems to fall back on the old standbys, of which the evil twin is one of the foremost. It's an easy path to follow and such stories almost write themselves.

The supporting characters are all of a type. The evil, mad scientist and his hunchback assistant who doesn't always approve of what his master does. The assistant, Borgo, has put up with a lot but cannot stand by when Dr. Frankenstein turns a gun on the villagers.

The thing about the villagers is that one has the feeling that even if Dr. Frankenstein wasn't evil, and if he had been trying to accomplish something positive, that the mob still would have been howling at his door. On this occasion they just happened to be right.

One oddball scene in the story has Dr. Frankenstein watching films of his ancestors to determine where they went wrong. He's decided that their mistake was trying to do something for the benefit of humanity instead of for themselves. It's not clear whether these films are actual films of his ancestors experiments or the Hollywood dramatizations!

Dr. Frankenstein is portrayed as a typical villain and in fact could be a double for the X-Men villain The Mastermind or the Fantastic Four villain The Miracle Man!

There are no subtleties to this story as the villain is completely heartless and the phone Surfer doesn't even have a twinge of compassion. At first we don't even know if this doppelganger has much intelligence as it says nothing after being brought to life and flies off silently when ordered to deal with the villagers who live below the castle.

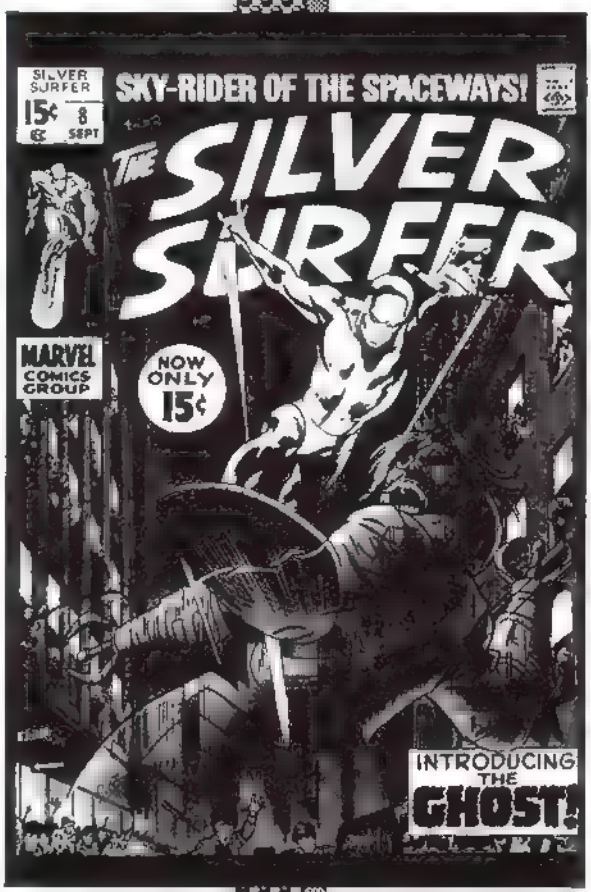
There is no mention in this story of the Surfer's time travel test nor why he wasn't able to use that to escape the Earth. It's just ignored.

The art is beginning to slip into a dull sameness and lacks any of the nice, little touches which Buscema brought to some of his earlier stories in the series. While one of the readers in the letters column states that only Jack Kirby should draw the Surfer, Buscema does a fine job and brings a great deal of sentiment and compassion to the character and if anything makes him more human than Kirby's version does. This is a more refined character, although the plot in this particular issue is anything but refined.

SILVER SURFER 8

Writer: Stan Lee
Penciller: John Buscema
Inker: Dan Adkins

Mephisto is plotting his revenge on the Silver Surfer, the only being ever to defeat him. He could kill the Surfer, but that would place the sky-rider's soul out of his reach forever, and the master of terror means to possess that soul for himself. Mephisto becomes so furious thinking about how the Surfer has eluded him that in the sky high above Earth, the Surfer feels the pain from Mephisto's fury as it assaults him. The Surfer, as powerful as he is, is hurt by Mephisto's power.



Finally the crimson demon hatches a scheme which will require the use of someone on Earth who practices the black arts. He finds one who is reciting a mystic incantation and terrifies the man when he appears before him. Mephisto is not appearing in answer to the man's summons, but rather has chosen this being himself. No mortal could hold power over Mephisto.

He puts the man into a deep trance and then contacts limbo, the realm outside Heaven and Hell where souls are doomed to wander for eternity. Mists and boiling clouds appear, and from this steps one of the living dead, a corpse clothed

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in tattered garments.

This is one of Mephisto's many victims, a soul tainted by the demon master's influence. Centuries before he had been a ship captain who was so possessed by the search for treasure that he forced his ship to continue into the teeth of a gale until all hands were lost. After Death had made its choices, this man, Joost Van Straaten, remained and was condemned to wander eternity as The Flying Dutchman.

The ghost pledges loyalty to Mephisto in hopes of being freed from his imprisonment in limbo. Mephisto uses his power to transform the man into a being of great power, an exaggerated version of his former self who at least bears a semblance of humanity although instead of hands he has claws of power.

When the amateur mystic dares to suggest that he should have some power over this ghost who has been given life and power, Mephisto has The Ghost strike down the foolish mystic as his first victim. Then he creates a ship of the sky for The Ghost to pilot and sets out to attract the attention of the Silver Surfer.

The Ghost appears in his ship over the city and begins to wreck havoc on the streets below to attract the attention of the Surfer. If he can gain The Surfer's soul, then Mephisto will free The Ghost from limbo forever.

****

It is obvious from reading this that the story was intended as the eighth giant-size issue of **The Silver Surfer**. This is apparent because these 20 pages deal almost entirely with Mephisto and The Ghost and form the backstory to the adventure to follow. But as is explained at the end of the issue, when the story was half finished it was decided to make The Surfer monthly and go to the normal comic book size. By that time it was too late to rework the story. So, as it stands, the

first part builds up to the second part, a perfect structure for a 39 or 40 page story but not when the story will be chopped in half. It's interesting to read but the balance is different as will be apparent with later stories structured for 20 pages.

The Surfer appears only briefly in this issue, on page 3 and in one panel each on pages 2 and 4. He later appears on pages 13 through 16 in a sequence in which Shalla Bal appears to him but then vanishes when he reaches out to touch her. She awakens on Zenn-La remembering having seen Norrin Rad and wondering at how incredibly vivid the dream was. This sequence reads as though it was hastily concocted to give the Surfer one more appearance in this issue as otherwise he would have appeared on little more than one page! The sequence serves the purpose of acquainting new readers with the Surfer's torment over his lost love.

Since Mephisto makes his first appearance since issue #3, he is reintroduced as well. His previous tempting of the Surfer is shown as the dark lord rages over how Norrin Rad resisted his efforts to gain his soul.

What isn't made very clear is exactly how The Ghost is supposed to gain the Surfer's soul for Mephisto. Granted, The Ghost is a catspaw and has as much power as Mephisto thinks his pawn needs, but how will an indirect approach and attack gain him the Surfer's soul when the direct approach failed before. The Ghost seems little more than a creature of power, and if power were the answer, then Mephisto could just as easily take on the Surfer himself.

It's demonstrated at the opening of the issue that the Surfer is susceptible to Mephisto's power when he feels agony when struck with the distant force of Mephisto's hatred. So the Surfer is by no means immune to Mephisto, but how can that alone win a

soul? A person must be corrupted in order for a soul to be consigned to Mephisto.

When The Ghost rides over the city in his sky ship, it is to attract the attention of The Surfer. In the old days this always worked and the wrong superhero never showed up to deal with the menace. But by 1969 Marvel had quite a few superheroes running around and surely one of the others could have shown up just as easily as the Surfer? This was a less complicated time.

The art has all of the old Marvel charm. The story is almost entirely comprised of three and four panel pages (something not seen much any more) and the art is very much in the Jack Kirby tradition while still maintaining the integrity of Buscema's own style. The story evokes all of the Marvel magic which was still very much alive at the company then while also making us wonder where Doctor Strange is when all this mystical tampering is going on?

Buscema work inked by Adkins is very interesting, particularly on page 3 when the Surfer endures the agony of Mephisto's mystic hate.

The story has the pure, uncomplicated thrust of Stan Lee's imagination hard at work to create an interesting story around this character he cares so much about. Lee was apparently fascinated by the inherent tragedy in this figure who was marooned on a planet whose existence he had saved but whose people dread and hate him.

But I still want to know why his faster-than-light travel didn't free him from Earth in issue #6!!

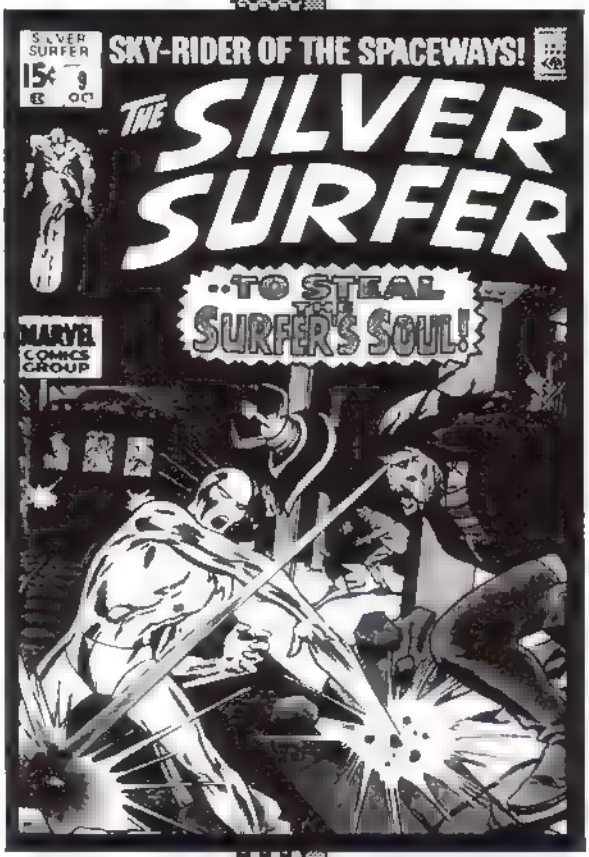
SILVER SURFER 9

Writer: Stan Lee
Penciller: John Buscema
Inker: Dan Adkins

The Ghost is attacking the city to attract the attention of The Silver Surfer, but so far there has been no response. Mephisto grows impatient and uses his powers to secretly prod the Surfer who decides to investigate his premonition of trouble in a city far below.

Meanwhile, the police have tried to attack the ship of The Ghost but their weapons have no effect. The Ghost shouts from the deck of the ship that he wants the Silver Surfer and just then the one he seeks attacks. The Ghost boasts that he is the Flying Dutchman and is in the service of Mephisto.

The Surfer remembers the smell of fire and brimstone when he was earlier attacked by a powerful, unseen force and now realizes his guess regarding Mephisto was correct.



The Ghost attacks, and if he can defeat the Surfer then the Surfer will lose his soul to Mephisto and The Ghost will be freed from Limbo. The Surfer doesn't defend himself as he fears that unleashing his power will harm the people nearby. He feigns injury but as The Ghost approaches he suspects the truth and attacks again. The Surfer's board flies in and blocks the attack.

The Surfer flees on his board but the flying vessel of The Ghost follows quickly in pursuit. The Ghost attacks again and knocks the Surfer from his board, making sure that he keeps attacking so that The Surfer cannot regain his board.

Mephisto has been observing all of this and is convinced that the Surfer's defeat is close at hand. The lord of the lower depths wants to be present when the de-

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feat occurs and so transfers himself to Earth. When he appears, he is seen by a policeman and others and so Mephisto wipes the memory of his presence from their minds and makes himself invisible.

While the Surfer attempts to lead The Ghost from the city, Mephisto strikes and blasts the Surfer from his board, ruining his plan. The Ghost attacks and knocks the Surfer through the pavement into the subway down below where he uses his cosmic power to halt an oncoming train.

The Ghost then enters the subway and attacks again. The Surfer plans to lead him out by fleeing on his board but Mephisto halts the board before it can reach Norrin Rad.

Again The Ghost attacks, calling out to the Surfer to pledge his soul to him so that the battle can be at an end. But The Surfer refuses.

In desperation, The Ghost takes a woman hostage and threatens her unless The Surfer yields. But to yield would be to give up his soul and this the Surfer cannot bring himself to do even with a human life at stake. The Surfer pleads with The Ghost, seeking to find the human compassion the creature had in life, but it attacks the Surfer to make him quiet.

Finally the Surfer call on his power at its utmost to strike down The Ghost without injuring the woman, and he succeeds. The Ghost could defeat the Surfer now, who is weakened after this display, but the pawn of Mephisto refuses. The Ghost sees that even he is not beyond redemption.

The Surfer pities The Ghost and feels remorse for what the man has endured. Because he sheds a tear for him, The Ghost is freed from limbo and is now beyond the reach of Mephisto, who has thus lost twice this day. But Mephisto vows to return as he will never accept defeat.

* * * *

Despite possessing cosmic power, The Surfer seems to be peculiarly vulnerable when not riding his board. He seems afraid of falling even though previous stories have indicated that his metallic skin makes him impervious to most things. Could he really be hurt in a fall?

In issue five he falls from the edge of space and is rendered unconscious, so surely a fall from a building couldn't cause him much discomfort. But time and again the board is shown to be of utmost importance to the Surfer, being a tool for flight as well as a shield in

battle.

The strange metal weapons on the hands of The Ghost are not specifically described except that he can blast things with them. He can also use his eye-patch as a weapon.

Mephisto reveals his eagerness to trap the Surfer when he too quickly transfers himself to the Earth so that he can be on hand at the moment of Norrin Rad's defeat. Invisible, Mephisto is even successful in helping The Ghost in the battle.

The Ghost was portrayed in his origin in #8 to be a man driven by greed, but who apparently discovered the error of his ways too late. The Surfer successfully appeals to The Ghost's lost humanity, which finally emerges at the moment when The Ghost could yet have defeated the Surfer.

The extent of Mephisto's power is demonstrated time after time as never before has anyone short of Galactus displayed the ability to control the Surfer's board. Since the board is linked to the Surfer and is considered a part of him, this revelation could indicate many other things about Mephisto's power as well. The demon lord has boasted more than once that he could slay the Surfer easily, and apparently this is no empty boast.

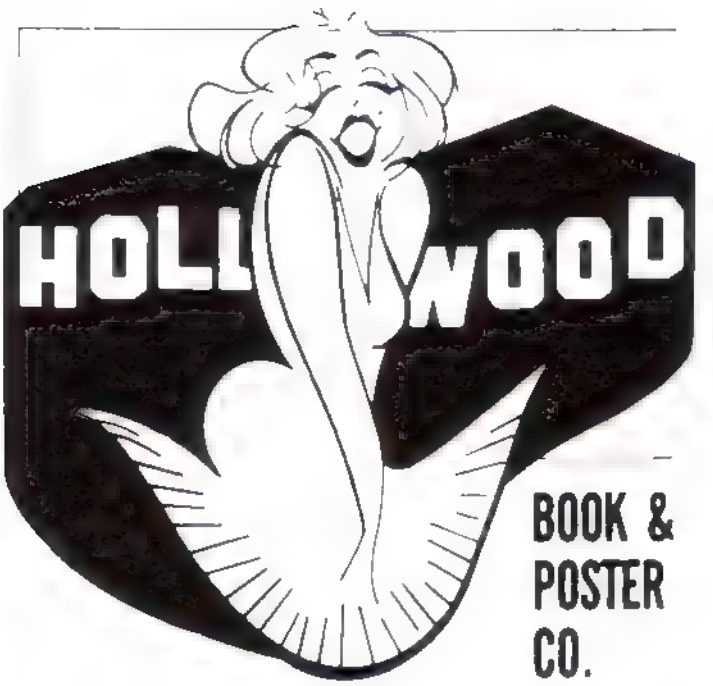
Something is revealed about The Surfer as well, that there is a line which he cannot be pushed across. When confronted with the prospect of saving a human life or giving up his immortal soul, The Surfer refuses to give in. To make this sacrifice would mean his eternal defeat and the sacrifice not only of all that he believes in but of any chance of ever escaping Earth and seeing Shalla Bal again.

While the latter is probably of secondary importance, it's clear that he feels honor-bound never to give Mephisto what he wants as eternal torment is clearly too high a price to pay for even an innocent human life.

No doubt another writer would have had the Surfer honorably surrender and then slip out of the agreement somehow later, but Lee has the Surfer take a stand and refuse to trade his soul for a human life. I don't know if another writer would handle this the same in a comic today. Too often superheroes are portrayed as completely selfless, even to the point of ridiculousness. To show that the Surfer has a point beyond which he will not go actually gives him added realism. The Surfer may be pure of heart, but he's not stupid.

This story marks the sec-

ond clash between The Surfer and Mephisto in a running battle which will continue for years. Only when the Surfer is freed from Earth is he finally freed of Mephisto. While Steve Englehart is not interested in dealing with Mephisto, a character that he feels has been overdone in the history of the Surfer, it might be worth doing a final Mephisto story, just as Spider-Man recently was featured in the final Kraven the Hunter story.



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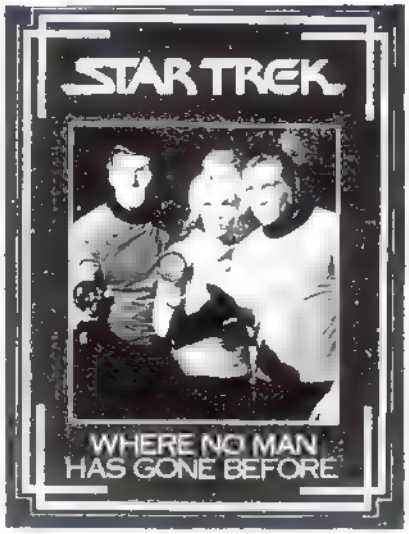

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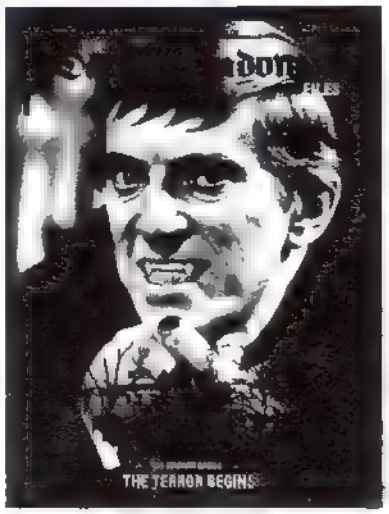

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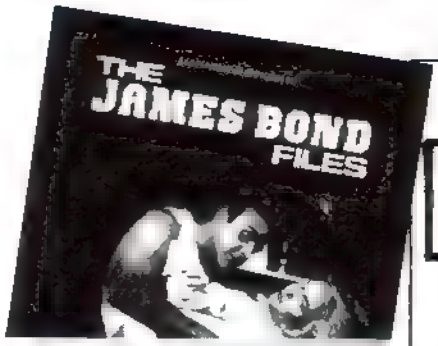

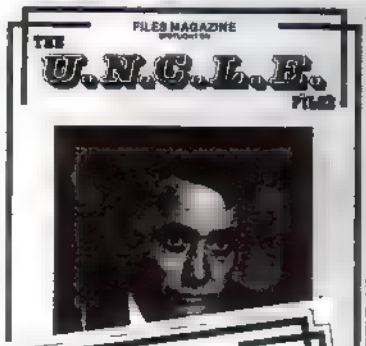

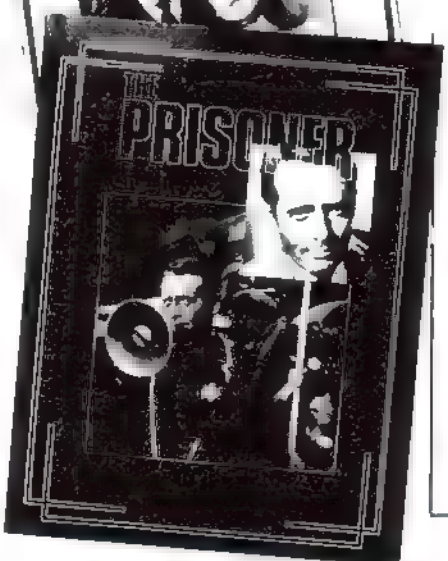

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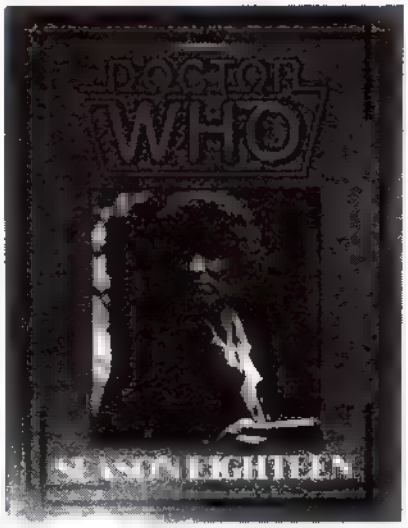

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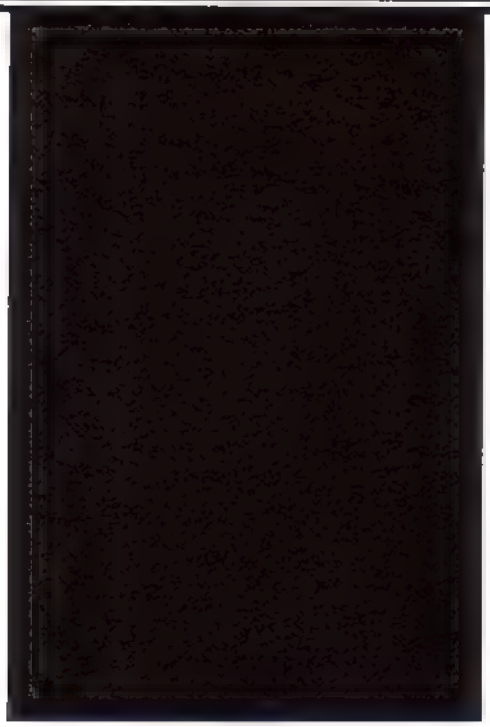

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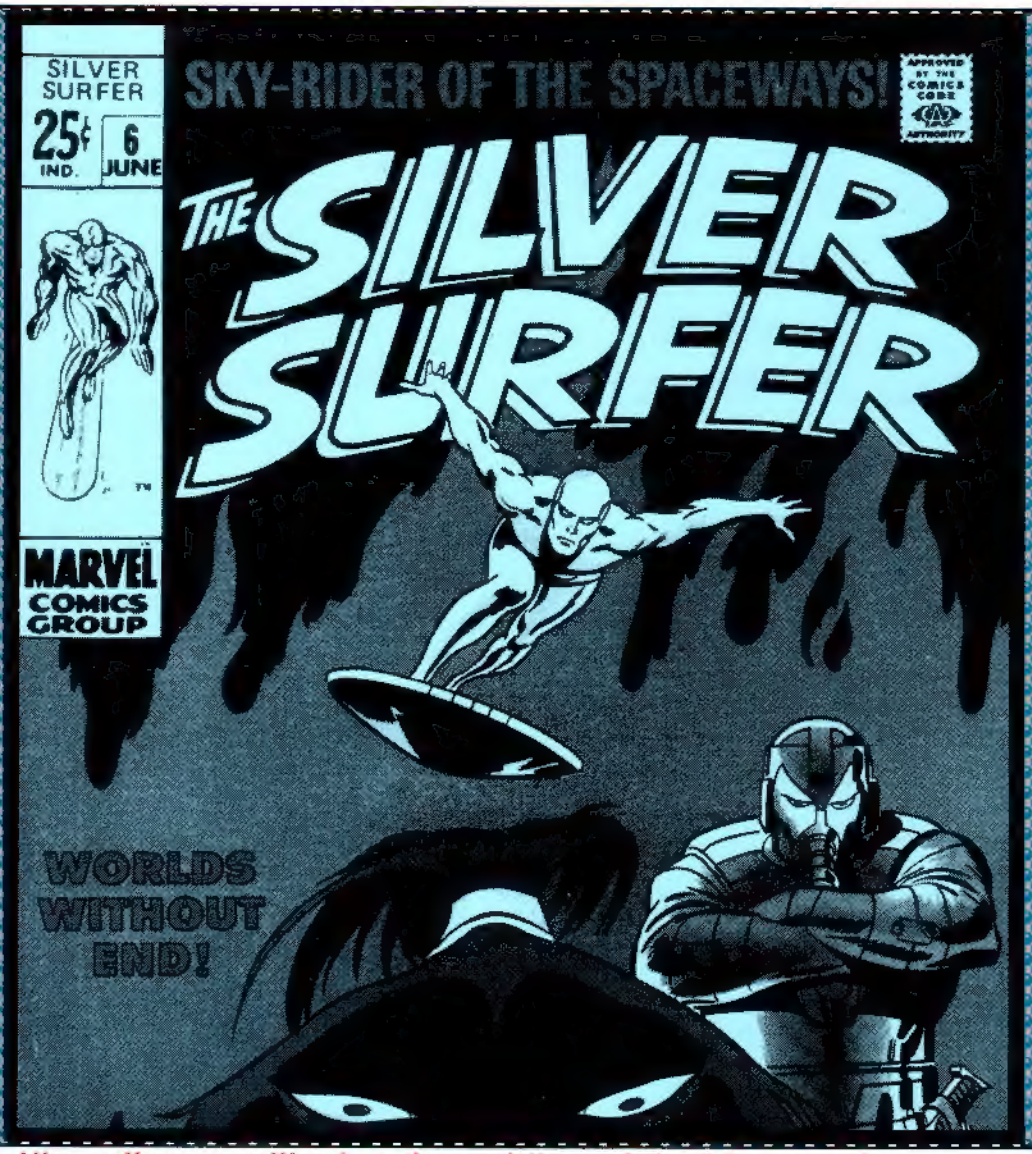

James Van Hise offers a critical review of the original issues of the cult classic hero recently revived by Englehart and Rogers. This is the hero that Stan Lee considers the most important one he ever wrote. Van Hise is the author of The Art of Al Williamson and Steve Ditko: The Unexplored Genius, as well as a contributing editor to Comics Feature. His work has also seen print in Comicscene and Starlog.

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